Touching the Energy of the Bodhisattvas

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Translated from Vietnamese into English by Sister Annabel

Dear Sangha, today is the 21 December 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Last time we talked about prostrating to Buddha Shakyamuni. The word Muni means silent. The basis of a monk is silence. So in fact Muni means monk, and Shakyamuni means a monk of the Sakya clan. "In one pointed mind I bow in respect to Maitreya Buddha. The name Maitreya means the person who loves; we say Mr. Love. Maitreya comes from the word maitri, which in Sanskrit means loving kindness, being able to offer a feeling of joy. Maitreya is the Buddha of the future. And in the Vietnamese tradition the beginning of the New Year is an anniversary symbolizing the day when we welcome the presence of the future Buddha, Maitreya.

"With one pointed mind I bow down before Manjusri." Manjusri stands for the eyes of understanding." With one pointed mind I bow down before Samantabhadra." Samantabhadra stands for action. "With one pointed mind I bow down before Sadapaributha." Sadapaributha stands for the wisdom in which there is the recognition that in everyone there is the capacity to become Buddha; enough seeds, enough love and understanding to become Buddha. So we do not despise anyone. And finally we bow down to all the ancestral teachers beginning from India to the present day in Vietnam. This contains all our ancestral teachers from Buddha to Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, Upali, Maudgalyayana; all the Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese meditation teachers. And when we touch the earth this time we're in touch with all those ancestral teachers. So, in Monday mornings chanting we bow down to Shakyamuni, Maitreya, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Sadapaributha, and all the ancestral teachers of all ages.

In these six bows we have to have a fruit. We should not prostrate mechanically. After we have prostrated we should be something different than before we prostrated. We should breathe in and out three times when we touch the earth in order to look deeply, be in touch and receive the energy of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, because this is a very effective method of transformation. The secret of prostrating is that when our head, arms and legs are touching the earth we let go. We let go of our idea of our self; we let go

of everything, which we call my idea of myself, my person, or my worth. Sometimes we think that we are alone and lonely, but when we are touching the earth with five limbs we have to open our self up, open all the doors of our body and our mind, and the idea about self has to be dissolved. And then prostrating is successful, and the energy of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers can enter us. That does not mean that the energy of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers is outside, that we have to open the door to let them in. In fact that energy is present within us. But if we don't allow it, it will not manifest.

For instance the energy of our father. The energy of our father is in us. It is in each of the cells of our body. Our father has both physical energy and spiritual energy, and that energy is in each cell of our body. Sometimes people have a father who has lived to be ninety years old and that father has never had cancer. All his cells are in us. And if we are afraid we have difficulties in our own flesh we could call on the energy of our father to come back to us and enter each cell of our body and do its work of healing. Our father has spiritual energy such as joy, skills, and capacities. But because we are angry with our father that energy of our father is closed up in our cells. When we prostrate we let go of all that anger, we let go of our idea of self, and the energy of our father becomes real in us and we can benefit from that energy. The energy of our teacher is the same. Our teacher has energy. And our teacher's energy is in each cell of our body. We may be angry with our teacher, or we feel far from our teacher. And those feelings mean that the energy of our teacher is shut up. But when we bow down we open up so that energy can emerge. The energy of Buddha is the same. The energy of Buddha is in each cell of our body. And therefore we need only to open the door of our soul and the energy of the Buddha will reveal itself. So prostrating is a very important practice and we have to learn to practice it correctly.

When we are prostrating our forehead should be touching the floor, and our two hands and our two feet should be touching the floor. We should be as close to the floor as possible, we should not leave any space between our body and the floor. And we have to let go of everything. We have to surrender our self and not hold anything back, which we consider to be "mine". All my inferiority complexes, my pride, everything I think that I am, all that I think my value is I let go of it and I become emptiness, and then the door opens and the energy of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers can be transmitted. If we keep our pride, our inferiority complex, that we have achieved this, we have achieved that, if we hold on to our anger, our hatred when we are touching the earth, then that stiff shell is still there and the prostrating has no fruit. So we have to let go of everything and then our body and our mind can be open. When our forehead is touching the earth and our two hands are touching the earth we open our hands to show that we are not hiding anything, holding anything, we have let go of everything. And our two hands have to be straight, opened up (and some people lift their hands up a little bit) to show I am not holding anything, I have wholly let go of everything, all my ideas about myself. And then you can join the stream, the spiritual stream or the life stream of your ancestors. Because we are cut off from that stream when we are lonely and caught in ideas of our self.

When we prostrate we have to be wholly there, and our body should be one with our mind, otherwise we prostrate like a machine, mechanically. Being wholly there means mindfulness, Right Mindfulness, which means the presence of body and mind as a unity. We stand before the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas. Our heart is mindfulness, we are really authentically present, and our mind is not in the past or in the future. We are not swept away or caught in our worries or our thinking. We bring our mind and body back to one place to be present with the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas and the object of our respect. And Right Mindfulness gives rise to a field of energy which is great, and that allows us to be in touch.

Buddha Shakyamuni represents our aim, our point of arrival; that is, the absolute, the upward direction.

There are two directions, Buddha represents the upper direction, and Mara represents the lower direction. There are moments in our life when our body and mind are going in the direction of Mara, when we are sad, when we are worrying, when we are going in a non-constructive way. For example we see on the table a very tasty dish. We have enough clarity to know that if we eat that dish we will receive unpleasant consequences. We know that very clearly. Our wisdom knows that if we eat that tonight we know what will happen. But there is another force which says: "Go on, eat it, what happens afterward will happen, there's always a medicine you can take." So there is a difference between the two. Wisdom says: "You shouldn't eat that." And then the other one says: "Why don't you eat it, go on, have it, let's live the present moment." And at that moment we can choose whether we go in the upper direction or the lower direction, it's up to us. And it depends whether we have the energy of mindfulness, whether our body and mind is together, because that will give us the opportunity to go in the upper direction. But if our mindfulness is weak then we don't have the force to go in the upper direction. And sometimes we go backward and forward all day long. So mindfulness helps us to have stable energy to go in the upper direction. Shakyamuni Buddha represents the upper direction. When we know our body and our mind are going in that direction we have faith and joy, which nourishes us. And when we touch the earth, one prostration, two, five, six prostrations, we know this practice is taking us in the upper direction. And when we know that we are going in the upper direction we feel at peace in our mind, we have stability and we are happy. And while we are prostrating we nourish that stability, that peace of mind and that happiness. And we are successful because of the energy of mindfulness.

We have a bodhisattva whose name is Manjusri. In the Prajñápáramitá school the position of Manjusri is very high, because Manjusri is Great Wisdom, and Prajñápáramitá means the wisdom, which takes us across. He can be symbolized by an eye, the eye of wisdom. Manjusri is the eye of wisdom of the Buddha. As far as history is concerned it may be different, but as far as the ultimate dimension is concerned we should know that the element of Manjusri is the element of wisdom in Buddha Shakyamuni. So Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjusri are the same. And when we touch the earth before Manjusri we are turning also toward our own capacity to wake up and become Buddha. The object of our prostration is not the statue of Manjusri on the altar. The object of our prostration is to be in touch with the element of Manjusri, which is in us, that is, the wisdom of the Buddha. "With one mind I bow down before Manjusri, the bodhisattva of Great Wisdom." And we see clearly that we are going in the energy of Great Wisdom when we do that, and our Right Mindfulness helps us to be in touch with bodhisattva Manjusri.

We have another bodhisattva whose name is Avalokitesvara. Avalokitesvara symbolizes another hand of the Buddha, and that is the hand of love and compassion. We can say that Avalokitesvara is Buddha; Avalokitesvara is the hand of love of the Buddha, because the Buddha is complete love and understanding. Usually Avalokitesvara is symbolized by an ear, because Avalokitesvara has the capacity to listen to the suffering of people, to understand, and to find them and help them. When we prostrate to Quan The Am (Avalokitesvara) we are in touch with the energy of love in our self. We see we have the capacity to listen deeply, to love and to understand. First of all to listen to our self, to hear our self and love our self. Because if we cannot understand and love our self how do we have the energy to love and understand others. So these sources of energy are all energies of the Buddha, and they are all in us. Manjusri is Buddha Avalokitesvara is also Buddha. Therefore you can understand that in the sutra it says that Manjusri had become a Buddha a long time ago, and Avalokitesvara had become a Buddha a long time ago, before the Buddha became a Buddha; that is because they are Buddha.

Another bodhisattva is called Samantabhadra, which means universal kindness. It is the energy of the great vow, great aspiration, and Great Action. Therefore Samantabhadra is symbolized by a hand, the hand of

action. And when we prostrate before Samantabhadra we are in touch with the energy of the aspiration and the action of Buddha, and Samantabhadra is the hand of the Buddha. Buddha is Great Understanding, Great Compassion and Great Action.

Alongside them we have another bodhisattva whose name is Ksitigarbha. Ksitigarbha is a bodhisattva who has a great aspiration. His aspiration is to be present wherever there is suffering, wherever there is hell; it could be our office. Therefore Ksitigarbha represents a Great Vow, Great Aspiration. A Great Vow is a great energy, and when we have the energy of Great Vow we are strong, we will not fall down before any difficulty. Even if it's cold below freezing we still go out. If there are thousands of obstacles on our path we still overcome them. When the mountains fall we still continue. Because in us we have a great vow. So we have Great Compassion, Great Understanding, Great Vow and Great Action, and those four things are what make Buddha. And in us it's the same, we all have these essences in us, Buddha is in us. And when we touch the earth, prostrate, we are in touch with these things in our self.

Sadapaributha means always not despising; he dared never to despise a living being. He does not dare to despise a profane person, because that profane person also has the matter of awakening in them. The raw materials of awakening in that person have not yet been watered and looked after so they haven't developed. That's why we call that person a profane person. But when we look at a profane person we should see these other things in them. You remember in the **Vajraccedika Sutra** (**"The Diamond Sutra"**) it says: "Because the Tathágata does not see a profane person as a profane person, that is why they are a profane person." So when we look at someone we look with that wisdom. We can join our palms and bow before any living being. Sadapaributha, never disparaging, does not dare to despise anyone.

If we don't have the energy of mindfulness we cannot be in touch with the great bodhisattvas. So while we are in touch with them as we prostrate our mindfulness needs to be complete, overflowing. If you don't know how to prostrate, then tonight when you have a chance please practice and learn how to do it. When we are standing and we join our palms and hear the words: "With one pointed mind I bow down before Manjusri" we already begin to visualize, to see that raw material, that hand of the Buddha, that energy of wisdom. We bring all our body and mind to one point, and we are in touch with that energy. Our hands are like a lotus bud, we touch our forehead: "With all our brain". We bring our hands down to our heart and we are in touch with our heart: "With all our heart". It means we take our brain, we take our heart, and then we put our two hands out to the side and touch the earth. And when our two feet, our two hands and our head are touching the earth we turn our hands upwards very straight, to show that we don't retain anything, we haven't held back anything of our self. And we open the doors of our soul, of our body, all the cells in our body, in order to receive the energy of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is already in our body, so that it can circulate in our body. And as we touch the earth we breathe in and out three times to look deeply. While we are on the earth we need to be really there, we need to follow our breathing, we need to allow the energy of the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, the ancestral teachers to manifest. And after we prostrate like that we will be a different person. After three breaths in and out there will be a stopping of the bell, and at that point we turn our two hands around to put them on the earth, and we stand up.

Those of you who invite the bell should practice to do it solidly so that the three breaths are allowed while somebody is touching the earth. We can measure the three breaths of the Sangha by our own breath, and if you want to be sure you can add another breath, because some people have a longer breath than others. This afternoon if you have an opportunity you can practice together, especially those of you who don't know how to prostrate yet, you can call it touching the earth. And in that way we do not lose our time. We do not use prostrations to pray or ask for something, but to help us to mature, to grow up, and to make us

strong; it is not to lessen our value. And the success of our prostrating depends if we have been able to let go of all our ideas and all the value we put on our self. And the final touching of the earth is touching the earth before the ancestral teachers from India to Vietnam. We have ancestral teachers, and we suffer and we are lonely when we are cut off from that stream of ancestral teachers. So when we put our self in the position of touching the earth, we open our heart and our body in order to receive the stream of the ancestral teachers, and that loneliness, that suffering will dissipate, and this is a very healing prostration.

We know that the bodhisattva Manjusri is present in the **Great Prajñápáramitá Sutra** and **"The Ratnakuta Sutra**." [This is one of the oldest sutras, which belongs to the Vaipulya group of forty-nine independent sutras. Summary: The philosophy of the middle is developed, which later becomes the basis for the Madhyamika teaching of Nargarjuna. It contains sutras on transcendental wisdom (Prajñápáramitá Sutra) and the Longer Amitabha Sutra.--BIONA Editor]
And that Samantabhadra is in the **Avatamsaka Sutra**, and Satapaributha is present in the Lotus Sutra. If we want to know more about these bodhisattvas we should study the Prajñápáramitá, the Avatamsaka and **The Lotus Sutra.**

Now we will go on to the Refuge Chant. In the Vietnamese text we have words "to go back", "to take refuge", and also "to give rise to aspiration". We need to take refuge in order to have safety and security, and we need to make a vow in order to have strength; we need these two things. So, we go back to our self and then we have the energy to go forward. This is the atmosphere in which we nourish our self, where the meditation hall is "full of the scent of sandalwood, and the lotus opens so that Buddha can appear." This atmosphere is thanks to the person who looks after the Buddha hall and makes it beautiful. And this virtue of looking after the Buddha hall helps us in our visualization. We have to visualize the conditions and the environment; we have to be able to see by means of images and not by means of ideas. We know that the basis of poetry is images. If you write a poem and you only use ordinary words, its not enough poems are written by images. If you say: "This afternoon I am sad" it's not enough. You have to say: "Today I am a gray cloud" or something like that. So, when you join your palms you have to set up the kind of surroundings where you will be able to realize your aspiration. So we make the Buddha hall very fragrant so that it is worthy of the presence of a Buddha or a bodhisattva. "The lotus opens and the Buddha is revealed." In our old liturgy it says: "When the flower opens we see the Buddha." This is the teaching of the Pure Land. On the altar there are flowers. If there aren't lotuses we visualize lotus. But Buddha is revealed not only when the lotus is opened. The Buddha Shakyamuni can reveal in any flower, in a little purple flower on the path, the tiny flower close to the earth. There are many opportunities for the Buddha to reveal. It's only our eyes, which aren't able to see the Buddha; the Buddha can reveal himself at any moment. It's because of our ignorance, because we are caught in our worries and our difficulties that we cannot see the Buddha in the flower. Especially when that flower is our heart. Because our heart is a flower, and our heart can open at any moment. "The lotus opens and the Buddha appears." This is a very wonderful image of the Buddha. And when we join our palms and visualize, Buddha will be there, because our mindfulness is there. And we should not complain that we have been born too late, two thousand six hundred years after the Buddha. We don't complain, because we know very well that when we are really there the Buddha is also there.

"The dharma realms become purified." That means the realms of suffering disappear and the pure Dharma realms appear. The suffering realms disappear because the Buddha has appeared. And when the Buddha appears the dharma realms appear. And we distinguish between lokadhatu and Dharmadhatu. Loka is the world; the worldly world Dhatu is the realm. So this is the field of suffering, of separation, where blood is spilt because of separation, it's the world where we see this lies outside of that, where older brother is not

younger brother, father is not son, trees are not humans, that is the world where we separate one thing from another, where we discriminate. And that is why anger and division take place and there is wounding. And then there is the Dharmadhatu. This is the world where Buddha is, and therefore older brother is younger brother, father is son, people are trees, you can see people in grass and you can see grass in people, you can see father in son, you can see son in father, you can see elder brother in younger brother. Because the light of the Buddha is there for us to see by. And when there is not the path of division, there is not the separating barrier, when there isn't the suffering of division there is happiness. And we join our palms to visualize, to see the Dharma hall full of the perfume of sandalwood, to see the lotus open with the Buddha, and to see the world of suffering becoming the dharma realms. That means we see the pure dharma realms. The karma which has brought suffering to living beings in the world calms down, and among those living beings we include our self. It means that the energy of our action has led us to suffering but now we feel lightened from this. In Vietnamese we say: "the calmness of the dust of the world." In the chant called "Taking Refuge with My Life" we have a phrase which says: "The karma of the dusty world does not do harm to us." The worldly dust with all its fetters, all its wounds. The world of men has wounds and fetters and it is called the world of dust for that reason. And dust has its color; it's called the red dust. When we become a monk or a nun we go in the direction of beauty. So why are we still caught in the red dust? The red dust is the fire of craving, the fire of sensual pleasure. When we become a monk or a nun we have coolness, so why do we go back and step into the dust of craving? We have to practice visualization in this chant for the surroundings to appear. Many things are there in these four lines. If we chant them like a parrot it's a great waste.

"The disciple with one pointed mind turns in the direction of the Three Jewels. Buddha is the teacher showing the way." This is meditating on the Buddha. It is called remembrance or recollection of Buddha. It's a practice of meditation. When we're chanting the sutra it's also a practice of meditation. Some people practice chanting like a parrot and that is not meditation. But if we practice looking deeply as we chant that is meditation. So "with a collected mind I turn to the Three Jewels". Here the word "collected" means to be wholly present. If you're not really there, you're pretending. If you are joining your palms with your body, and your mind is thinking about tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, that is a pretence. It means to be wholly there, mindfulness is there and concentration is there. Sometimes we are not collected and we think we are collected. We think we're not deceiving anybody. We think: "I am true, I am really there." But maybe I'm not really there, because I haven't got concentration and mindfulness. "My body and my mind are one" means I am not thinking about other things, I'm not angry with my brothers and sisters, I'm not worrying about tomorrow, I'm not regretting yesterday. And that is called collected mind, one pointed mind.

When we have a one pointed mind we can turn to the Three Jewels. In Sanskrit it's triratna. Tri means three ratna means a jewel. "Buddha is the teacher showing me the way." Buddha is above all a teacher. That is important. Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not the creator-god. Buddha is a human being like us. But because in that person there is the essence of wisdom, of compassion, of great action, of great vow, that person is worthy to be our teacher, and therefore we have to call Buddha "teacher". Buddha is not a god to give us happiness, not a god that we can offer flowers to. Buddha is the person who shows us the way, so we don't fall into the abyss of making mistakes. In Chinese it's dao Su, path teacher. The top character means "the way", and on the bottom is the character for "hand", and together they mean the hand that shows us the way or "guide". So when you talk about somebody as our teacher showing us the path, he is the one who is wholly awakened, completely enlightened. In Sanskrit awakened is bodhi. Here we see that the basis of our teacher showing us the way is Great Wisdom, full awakening. As far as the outer form is concerned it's something very beautiful, this is talking about the body of the Buddha. And as far as the

mind is concerned it is fulfilled understanding and compassion. The Vietnamese word for fulfilled means complete and full. So we say he's the completely fulfilled awakened one, the Buddha, great, full, awakened. What is full? What is complete? Compassion and the understanding are fulfilled and complete. So, we have four lines to read about the Buddha. And when we read those four lines we should be able to have an image, a visualization of the Buddha, in terms of energy and not in terms of bronze or wood. And then we can be in touch with that energy. And that is what is called buddhanusmrti, visualization of Buddha, mindfulness of the Buddha.

Dharma is the right path leading people out of the world of ignorance, taking us back to live an awakened life. So now instead of meditating on the Buddha we are meditating on the Dharma, recollecting the Dharma. And finally we have recollection of Sangha.

Once we've been in touch with Buddha we are in touch with Dharma as the bright path which can take us out of the realms of ignorance where we are not awake, where we are dreaming, where we cannot see the truth. And that path can take us back to live a life of awakening. Before that we lived a life of forgetfulness. So the life of awakening is above all the life of mindfulness. We are present, really there in each moment. And at that point we can be in touch with everything, which is happening, deeply. That is called mindful living. When we have mindfulness, quite naturally concentration and understanding follow, and our life must be an awakened one. And that life of awakening isn't something we hope to have tomorrow, it is something, which we have right away, now.

"The Sangha is a beautiful community which goes together on the path of joy." It's a very beautiful image, which helps us to recognize what is the real Sangha. If a Sangha is not beautiful, does not have happiness, it cannot be called a Sangha. This is perhaps the best line in this chant. "Sangha is a beautiful community going together on the path of happiness." We're not going on our own. If we are all going on our own we cannot call it Sangha. Sangha is not a small drop of water. Sangha is a river. Only a river can go to the sea. And we have to be one with the Sangha. We have to take the Sangha as our body. And then we have a Sangha body. "I vow to be a river and not a small drop of water"...you can make the next two verses of this poem, because everybody has a poet in them. "I vow to be a river and not to be a small drop of water..." you have to make the next two lines. "The Sangha is the beautiful community", and the beauty of this community is made of the essence of the precepts, fine manners and harmony. And looking into the precepts, the fine manners and the harmony people have faith. Any place that has precepts, fine manners and harmony, that place has happiness and beauty and that's why we say the Sangha is the beautiful community together taking the joyful path.

When we went to the United States and we called in at Omega Institute there were the beautiful red and yellow leaves of autumn, and we had an opportunity to look at the branches of the maple trees. And they looked so beautiful, because each leaf on the branch stays in its place. In itself each leaf wasn't perfect, they might have been eaten by caterpillars. But they looked very beautiful when you looked at the branch, because each leaf stayed in its place. The beauty of the branch was thanks to each leaf being in its place. A Sangha is the same. Looking into the harmony of the Sangha we see its beauty. That beauty is made by what is called the Six Harmonies. "The Sangha is the beautiful community going together on the joyful path, practicing liberation and helping peace and joy to come into life." The business of the Sangha is to practice liberation. It's not to build temples or to do social work, but to practice toward liberation, and to train in liberation. That training, that practice has only one aim, that is to undo the knots in the ropes which tie our body and our mind: our anger, craving, ignorance are ropes, jealousy is a rope, etc. and they bind us. We have to be liberated from these things. The aim of our practice is liberation, and this training is to bring

us freedom. Who are you practicing liberation for? For yourself. And to help others to liberate themselves. And that will bring you peace and joy, and bring peace and joy into life. Happiness, if you don't have peace you don't have happiness. We have an opportunity to meditate on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and each of these meditations is four lines long. Later we will have another chant, which is more complete concerning meditation on these three things. I take refuge in the Three Jewels. And if we leave one of these three jewels we will not be able to practice.

"I know the Three Jewels are in my heart." I know that the Three Jewels protect me from outside, but they are also in me. This is the teaching of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in oneself. And the matter of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in our self is what makes the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha around us.

"I vow diligently to enable these Three Jewels to grow brighter in my heart." The Three Jewels are three precious things. "I vow to follow my breathing, to smile the half smile, freshly." Breathing here is conscious breathing. Although we are cooking, washing clothes, doing the gardening, we are following our breathing. Because if we don't follow our breathing we lose the present moment. "I open the half smile freshly." This smile is a sign that I am practicing mindfulness; it is a smile of mindfulness. When somebody practices and smiles, the practitioner should know whether the smile is a worldly smile or whether it is a smile coming from mindfulness, a smile, which recognizes I am going on the path of the right Dharma. I have a lot of happiness, a lot of good fortune because of that. And if we have a smile, which arises from that, that smile can freshen our mind and our body, and also freshen those around us. But there is all sorts of laughter and smiling which we should not take part in. Smiles, which are discriminating smiles, which are full of ignorance, we should not use this kind of smile. We should only use the smile of awakening. And when we can smile like that, people will see clearly that the Sangha is a beautiful community. We are going together on the path of beauty, the path of happiness.

"I vow to learn to look at life with the eyes of deep looking." We have two eyes like other people. But usually when other people look they look superficially. We look deeply, with the eyes of deep looking. And the more we look like that, the more we understand. And the more we understand the more we love. Therefore we say "looking at life with the eyes of love", this is a sentence which we see in the Lotus Sutra. The reason why we can look with the eyes of love is because we know how to look deeply.

"I vow to try and understand the suffering of all beings." The first Dharma talk of the Buddha was about the Four Noble Truths. The first noble truth, which the Buddha talked about, was about the presence of suffering in the world. In the fourth precept of the Tiep Hien Order it says we should not close our eyes before suffering. We have to be present with those who are suffering, accept the presence of suffering, and look deeply into the basis of that suffering. Because looking deeply into the basis of suffering is the only way to see the way out of suffering. "I vow to try to understand the suffering of all species, to practice love, compassion, and to put into action joy and equanimity." Love, compassion, joy and equanimity are the true basis of authentic love. And we will have an opportunity to learn more about these four things later. The more we practice these the more they develop, and the more our happiness increases and the happiness of those around us also increases. "In the morning I will give to someone a feeling of joy, and I want in the afternoon to help someone suffer less." This is something, which is within our grasp, something we can do. We can do it by looking after that person, by a way of looking at them, by something we say; this is a practice. You should not say: "I practice love, compassion, joy and understanding." You have to really practice with those around you. Because there are those around you who do not yet have enough happiness. And so in the morning you can do something to make at least one person more happy, and in

the afternoon at least one person suffer less. In the English version we say: "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning." You use the word "one" which we don't use in the Vietnamese version. Then you can say every day: "Beings are without limit, I vow to save them all", and so you don't help just one person in the morning and one person in the afternoon. In Vietnamese they don't put the word "one", although it could mean one person. It means at least one in the morning and at least one in the evening.

"I vow to live a simple life", that means a life of few desires. This is the principle of our daily life. Because in consumer society we think that happiness is to have many material things, but in fact on our path the more simply we live the more happiness we will have. To have happiness we need to have few desires. So we have to say to our self: "Now I have enough, there is no need for me to go and acquire more." "I know I've got enough already, I don't have to run out and buy any more." This is the principle for people who are going shopping. "A life, which is healthy." A simple life goes with good health. The more you consume the more you harm your body and mind. How can every moment of our daily life have peace and harmony in it? Harmony in our heart, harmony between us and others, and peace. That leads to our body being strong. We have to practice so that our body is strong too. If we have difficulties with our intestines, we have to be careful what we eat and drink. We have to know how to clean our intestines, that is our practice. And that comes from mindfulness.

"I vow to abandon anxiety, and practice forgiving and tolerance." We have worry and anxieties in our mind, which add kilos of weight to our heart. So we have to abandon these worries. If you can't do it on your own you should ask the help of your teacher, your brothers and your sisters: "Help me to let go of this burden." If we keep carrying these burdens around with us all day long and take them to bed with us when we sleep then it is not good, so we need to brush them off our coat in order to have liberation and we feel light within our self. And when we feel light and free in our self, then our brothers and sisters are grateful to us and gain from us.

I vow to hold deep gratitude". That is I feel I need to help my mother and my father, whether they're alive or they've passed away. I practice so that they can be light and free. They are in us and they are outside of us. And our daily practice is to help us to be light and free, to help mother and father in us also to be light, free and liberated. Whoever constantly practices stability and freedom is always helping their family. Gratitude to my father and mother, gratitude to my teacher, gratitude to my spiritual friends and to all beings. These are the four gratitude's. "I vow to practice diligently so that the tree of compassion and understanding will flower." Every day we have to be diligent, putting all our mind into our practice of liberation and not allowing our mind to worry about other things, things which are not important. The most important thing is the practice of liberation. Diligently means putting all our energy into one direction, the direction of developing liberation.

There is a tree in us, and that tree is a flowering tree, that is our practice. And if we know how to look after that flowering tree it will have many flowers. The flowers of compassion and the flowers of wisdom. And one day there will be the capacity to help all species. We may not yet be Buddha, but in the meantime we can help people. We can help our brothers and sisters, and help the practitioners who come to practice with us. And then we know that in the future we will be able to do the same as Buddha. Because we have begun to do that already today. "I ask the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha to be my witness, to support us, give us more energy, protect us, so that we may wholly realize our great vow." This is the energy of Samantabhadra and Ksitigarbha, the energy of the Great Vow.

Now we go on to Monday Evening. If you've already studied Samantabhadra's Vows it will help you a lot.

I know that the New Hamlet has studied it, I don't know about the Upper Hamlet, how much they've studied. In the New Hamlet they've studied twelve sections. The next Dharma talk will be in English, on the 24th, and maybe the next two also. So after we've had two or three Dharma talks in English we will come back again to studying this in Vietnamese.